



# Foundation *for* Opioid Response Efforts

## **FORE Awards New Grant to Address Impact of Post-COVID Medicaid Policy Changes on Access to Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder**

**NEW YORK (March 7, 2024)** – The [Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts \(FORE\)](#) today announced it is awarding a new grant to [RAND](#), a nonprofit research organization, to examine the impact of post-COVID-19 changes in Medicaid policy on the ability of people to access the medication buprenorphine for treatment of opioid use disorder. During the years of the pandemic, a federal flexibility in policy required state Medicaid programs to keep low-income individuals continuously enrolled, but in March 2023 this requirement was dropped, and states began to disenroll people, referred to as “unwinding.” Since Medicaid covers approximately 40% of all people using medication-based treatment for opioid use disorder, it is important to understand the impact these policy changes are having on people with opioid use disorder.

“Medicaid is the single largest payer for opioid use disorder treatment and a lifeline for people who are often at the highest risk of overdose,” said Karen A. Scott, MD, MPH., president of FORE. “It is therefore critical to understand how a significant shift in the program may be impacting a person’s ability to initiate and continue medications for opioid use disorder.”

“We saw the negative effects of Medicaid unwinding last year when several patients lost Medicaid coverage and were no longer able to access buprenorphine,” said Blake Fagan, MD, director of Opioid Treatment Services at the [Mountain Area Healthcare Education Center \(MAHEC\)](#) in North Carolina and FORE grantee. “In December, the state changed policy and expanded Medicaid, which reduced barriers to access and was life changing for many patients.”

RAND is receiving a FORE grant of \$386,068, over 18 months to undertake an in-depth analysis of the impact of Medicaid unwinding on access to buprenorphine, with a particular focus on groups who often face significant barriers to accessing treatment. The findings could be used by policymakers to identify and potentially implement state policies to reduce disenrollment and ensure continuity of evidence-based care for people with opioid use disorder.

This latest grant builds on previous support RAND received from FORE for projects to understand the impact of policy changes for [prescribing and accessing buprenorphine](#)

treatment during COVID-19. The project will add to FORE's portfolio of projects to inform health policies which can improve access to treatment which to date totals \$10.2 million in grants.

FORE will host a webinar on "[State Policy Landscape to Address the Opioid and Overdose Crisis in 2024.](#)" featuring RAND and other experts on March 13, at 3pm ET.

### **Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE)**

FORE was founded in 2018 as a private 501(c)(3) national, grant-making foundation focused on addressing the nation's opioid crisis. FORE is committed to funding a diversity of projects contributing solutions to the crisis at national, state, and community levels. FORE's mission is to support partners advancing patient-centered, innovative, evidence-based solutions impacting people experiencing opioid use disorder, their families, and their communities. Through convening, grantmaking and developing informational resources, FORE seeks to bring about long-term change. To date, FORE has awarded 103 grants to 90 organizations, totaling \$40.5 million. Follow us on [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

Source: Foundation for Opioid Response Efforts (FORE)

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